



Marshal Rydz-Smigly, a Polish Idi Amin who bragged: “Poland wants war with Germany and Germany will not be able to avoid it even if she wants to” (*Daily Mail*, August 6th, 1939).

The Tunnel at Dora

Paul Rassinier

The date was March 31, 1944. For the past week the Kapos, the Lagerschutz, and the Block Chiefs had been particularly on edge. Quite a number of prisoners had died from blows; lice were found not only in the Tunnel, but even among the Kommandos outside; and the S.S.-Führung laid the responsibility for this state of affairs on the H-Führung. On top of that, the weather the whole day long was terrible: it was colder than usual, and an icy rain mixed with hail came down without any let-up. In the evening, we got to the muster grounds, frozen, soaked, and hungry beyond belief. How we hoped the roll would not last too long! But, there was no such luck. At ten o'clock we were still standing at attention under the rain of hail, waiting for the order *Abtreten!* (break ranks!) which would liberate us. Finally it came, and we could go and eat the hot soup in a hurry and fall onto the straw. We got to the Block and began the shoe-cleaning. But, then, gesturing that we should stay outside, the Block Chief, standing framed in the entrance, announced that since lice had been found, the whole camp was going to be disinfected.

It was to begin that night. Five of the 35 Blocks were picked for *Entläusung* (delousing) that night. Consequently, that night there was no soup until that was over. The delousing process then began: “*Alles da drin!*” (Everybody in there!). We went into the Esszimmer with our shoes in our hands. “*Ausziehen!*” (Undress!). We took our clothes off, wrapped them in a bundle with the number on top. “*Zu fünf!*” (By fives!). That frightened us. “*Zu fünf!*” We form into lines. With the Stubendienst carrying our clothes on blankets, surrounding us, all naked, in the cold, in the rain and the snow, we went in the direction of the building where we were to be deloused. There were about 800 yards to cross.

When we got there, the four other Blocks, naked like us, were already pushing against the entrance. We felt Death in our presence. How long would it last? There were about a thousand of us, all naked and shaking in the wet and the cold which penetrated to our very bones, pushing at the doors. There was no way to get in. Only forty at a time could go in. The scene was hideous. At first we tried to force our way in, but the delousing men kept us back with water hoses. Then we wanted to go back to the Block to wait our turns; but that was impossible since the Lagerschutz, truncheons in hand, surrounded us. So we had to stay there, crowded together, between the water and the truncheons, soaked and beaten. We pressed together. Every ten minutes, forty of us were allowed to enter the delousing chamber in a crush that was a life and death struggle. Elbows went into play; there were fights, and the weaker were mercilessly trampled underfoot, and their bodies were found at dawn. At about two in the morning, I succeeded in getting inside, Fernand behind me, where we received a haircut, cressyl, and shower. At the exit we were given a shirt and a pair of shorts which we wore when we went out into the night to return to the Block. I felt as though I had accomplished some act of heroism. When we came to the Block, we went into the Esszimmer where a Stubendienst handed us our clothes which had been disinfected. Next came soup and bed.

At reveille, the sinister comedy was just barely finishing. At least half of the Block got back only just in time to get dressed, get soup, get the daily ration, and hurry to the grounds to go to work. And, there were a number missing: those who had died during the execution of this sorry business. Others survived it only for a few hours or for two or three days and were carried away with the inevitable double pneumonia. The job itself probably killed as many men as it did lice.

How did it happen? The S.S.-Führung was responsible only for the decision to disinfect five Blocks per day, and the H-Führung was left in complete control of how it was to be carried out. A schedule could have been set up: at eleven, Block 35, at midnight, 24, at one, number 32, etc... The Block Chiefs could have, within this framework, sent us in groups of one hundred at twenty-minute intervals, for example, and in our clothes. But no, that would have been too simple.

When what took place on the night of March 31st reached the ears of the S.S.-Führung, the latter itself set up an exact schedule the next morning for the Blocks that remained to be disinfected.

April 2, 1944: Easter. The S.S.-Führung decided on a twenty-four hour rest period which was not to be disturbed except by a general roll-call, that is, the Tunnel people as well as the quarry workers would be present. The weather was magnificent, a radiant sun in a pure calm sky. Joy;

the Gods were with us! We got up at six instead of four-thirty: washing and food distribution was done at a slower pace.

Nine o'clock. All the Kommandos were on the grounds at attention. The Lagerschutz went in and out among the groups; Block Chiefs were at their stations. The Lagerältester chatted familiarly with the Rapportführer. He had a paper in his hand: a detailed list of the camp personnel drawn up by the Arbeitsstatistik. About thirty S.S. in helmets, their pistols in holsters, were assembled at the entrance to the camp: the Blockführer. It looked as though all were going to go well.

A whistle blew, and the Blockführer spread out fan-wise, each toward the Block which it was his responsibility to oversee. Each one made his count and compared his figure with that which the Block Chief handed him. "*Richtig*" (Correct). One by one the Blockführer came to report to the Rapportführer who waited, pencil in hand, and who wrote down the figures as they were given him.

There was not one discordant note; the roll-call would not last long. The S.S. wanted to take advantage of this Sunday and were moving fast. We were exultant: one day of rest with nothing to do but to eat our soup and to stretch out in the sun.

Just a minute! The total number of prisoners which the Rapportführer had did not tally with the figure given to him by the Arbeitsstatistik; there were twenty-seven fewer men on the grounds than on the paper. Question: what had become of them? The Kapo of the Arbeitsstatistik was sent for in a hurry. He was asked to go over his figures right away. One hour later he came back, with the same figure. Perhaps, then, the S.S. had made a mistake. The count was made again, and the Rapportführer came up with the same figure. They searched through the Blocks, they searched through the Tunnel; they found none of the missing prisoners.

It was noon. The ten thousand or so prisoners were still on the grounds waiting for the figures of the Arbeitsstatistik and of the S.S.-Führung to agree. Time dragged; some men fainted: those whose turn it was to die fell down, never to get up again; those with dysentery relieved themselves as they stood; the Lagerschutz felt that things were getting slack and began to lay about. The S.S. guards whose Sunday was threatened were furious. They went off to eat, but we stayed there. At two o'clock they came back.

Suddenly the Kapo of the Arbeitsstatistik came running: he had come up with another figure. A murmur of hope rose from the crowd. The Rapportführer looked over the new figure and became violently angry: there were still eight men missing. The Kapo of the Arbeitsstatistik went away again. He came back at four. Now no more than five men were missing. At eight only one was still missing, and we were still there, pale, drawn, and exhausted, after having stood for eleven hours, with empty stomachs. The S.S. decided to send us to eat. We left. Behind us the Totenkommando picked up some thirty dead.

At nine, it all began again, in an attempt to find the missing man. At eleven forty-five, after various comings and goings, this missing man was found, too; the S.S.-Führung and the

Arbeitsstatistik were in agreement. We went back to our Blocks and were able to go to bed, again leaving behind us ten or more dead.

There you have the explanation of why the roll-calls took so long. Those employed in the Arbeitsstatistik, illiterate or nearly so, had been made bookkeepers only as a favour, and they were incapable of adding up at the first count the number of men present. The concentration camp was a world where every man's place was determined by his connections and his cunning and not by his abilities. Accountants were made masons, carpenters became accountants, wheelwrights became doctors, and doctors became fitters, electricians or road-graders.

From Paul Rassinier: *The Holocaust Story and the Lies of Ulysses*, Institute for Historical Review, 1978, pp. 74-77